

An informational publication for employees of the Administrative Office of the Courts

Neither floods nor quakes nor gloom of night will keep AOC off-line

Tucked away in a small section of AOC's Building 2 are a handful of staff members who have spent years becoming experts in skills they hope to never use.

And if they ever do have to use these skills, it will happen so fast and out of sight that Washington's courts and even most AOC staff members might never know what actually took place.

They're kind of like digital ninjas.

This is the JIS Disaster Recovery (DR) team, which has been working for the past six years to grow increasingly adept at protecting court records, restoring JIS and AOC's systems and our 1-800 phone number as quickly as possible following any disaster. If another strong earthquake were to hit South Sound, for instance, while courts are starting to assess their damages, DR team members will be climbing into cars and airplanes to execute well-rehearsed action plans for getting courts and AOC back online, even if they have to leave the state to do so.

DR team members completed the first of two rehearsals scheduled for 2011 during a weekend in March, "probably the best test yet," said ISD Infrastructure Group Manager Dennis Longnecker.

What does "best yet" mean? It means team members got critical JIS and AOC systems back online faster than ever before. So in a real disaster, back home from the rubble or ashes or receding flood waters, court and AOC staff members within a day or two could begin contacting the AOC via phone, log into JIS systems and get the local and state judicial systems moving again.

It also means recovery went smoothly enough that Washington court staff working on that March weekend seamlessly accessed the JIS system, which had been restored to hardware located in Scottsdale, Arizona.

Four people and a binder

April is Washington's Disaster Preparedness Month, and with worldwide natural disasters prominent in the news, it's a fitting time to examine how AOC would respond to a disaster that disabled much of AOC or courts around the state.

ISD Infrastructure's DR Team began developing their recovery skills six years ago when the Judicial Information System Committee (JISC) approved funding for disaster recovery efforts. This included contracting with a company — SunGard — which provides facilities, PBX equipment and computer hardware around the U.S., Mexico and Canada where clients can travel to set up a command center of sorts for recovering their systems.

JIS records are also backed up and sent to a secure Eastern Washington facility daily, retrievable if AOC's systems become seriously damaged.

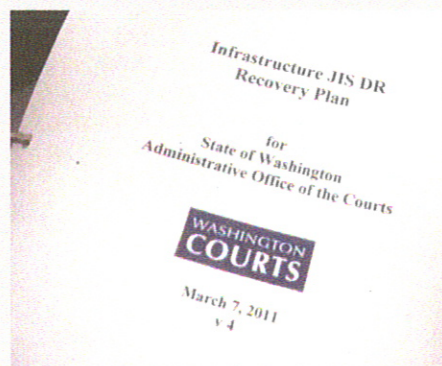
That first drill six years ago included four AOC staff members — Dennis Longnecker, Kirby Tingle, Gale McGrath and Wayne Campbell — flying to Chicago with a binder.

The most recent drill in March involved 35 staff members who either flew to a "mega-center" in Arizona, drove to a "metro-center" in Federal Way or





Christine Winslow demonstrates how the two "Phoenix" cases are loaded with supplies and updated regularly for JIS Disaster Recovery readiness.



supported the test from AOC.

Both off-site teams used huge, reinforced, rolling cases full of discs, documentation, plans, and supplies. These cases even have names — "Genesis" and "Phoenix" — not just because they contain the seeds of regenerating JIS and AOC systems, but to tell them apart. AOC always has one set of cases (they come in sets of two because recovery team members are sent to two locations) in Bldg. 2 being updated with new files and documentation, and one set is always kept off-site in Eastern Washington, ready to be shipped if a disaster occurs.

The cases are pretty stuffed but "we're still trying to figure out how to get the espresso machine in there," said Infrastructure Program Associate Christine Winslow, who was asked to join the recovery effort shortly after it started six years ago to boost it to the next level.

Depending on the disaster and SunGard's activity levels, JIS recovery team members could also be sent to Denver, Chicago, Philadelphia, New Jersey or Hawaii.

"It has definitely grown," Winslow said of the recovery drills and planning. "We learn something new each time."

That 'something new' then makes it into the recovery plans and into the cases sent off-site.

Who you gonna call?

The JIS Disaster Recovery team is a key part (though not the only part) of AOC's response. Also working on emergency preparedness for the agency are Staff Services Manager Jan Wilson and Risk Management Coordinator Charley Bates — with the help of many AOC staff members — who have already created plans for evacuations, communications, managing AOC facilities and getting the agency's business operations moving again when a disaster strikes.

(For an earlier report on emergency planning for AOC buildings and staff, go onto Inside Courts, click on "AOC" and "AOC News," then open the November 2009 AOC News Briefs.)

JIS Disaster Recovery is a mission of the Infrastructure section of ISD, overseen by Longnecker, Winslow and Tingle with many staff members rotating in and out of lead roles working the drills so the entire Infrastructure staff has experience working on recovery.

Recovery team members work many long hours over a 48-hour weekend drill, often only getting short naps in between long sessions restoring systems.

So here's how it works:

A disaster rumbles, blows or washes over a part of Washington, including AOC, damaging buildings and systems. Longnecker would connect up with ISD Director Vonnie Diseth to assess the damage to JIS and call Washington Court Administrator Jeff Hall, who would communicate with the Chief Justice.

Hall would declare an emergency and SunGard would be contacted, setting the recovery process in motion. SunGard would assign the AOC to two locations, depending on the disaster, resources available, and other impacted areas around the U.S.

From there a phone tree of calls goes out to recovery team members, who set out by car or plane. The team has an emergency

letter on file allowing them to travel in case of disaster.

Because so many Infrastructure and ISD staff members have been cross-trained in recovery, if one person cannot go then another could fill that slot.

Another call is also made to AOC's contractor, Iron Mountain, which immediately ships either the Genesis or Phoenix cases out to the assigned recovery centers.

Then Infrastructure JIS recovery team members go to work, likely for many hours or days. Core systems are brought up in an order dictated by the JISC as fast as possible. On her wall, Winslow has a large timeline with 240 separate steps prepared for use prior to the most recent drill, showing when system restores were expected to begin and when that task was successful – some systems were functional hours sooner than expected during this most recent test.

And back in Olympia, or in courts throughout the state, staff members can begin working toward restoring normal judicial operations using the recovered JIS systems.



Christine's large timeline poster -- it has to be put together in three sections -- is attached to the wall outside her cube in Bldg. 2. It includes 240 separate steps which must be completed to get needed JIS and AOC systems back online in 48 hours.

Ready to recover

The DR ninjas, er, team members have gotten so good at their quiet work that three years ago, auditors hired by the JISC found they were in the 99th percentile of efficiency. According to the audit report, "AOC complies, in all material respects, with the selected standards. Further, AOC's thorough documentation and regular testing assures that the agency is well prepared for foreseeable recovery situations."

Part of the team's success, says Winslow, is learning to be perpetually prepared. "We try to get people out of the mindset that there is a start and end date to this," she said. For instance, if something in JIS changes, the Infrastructure staff members update the Disaster Recovery process and the Genesis and Phoenix cases.



Following the successful drill in March, the DR team relaxed for about a week. Then team members started scheduling meetings to plan for the next drill in September.

"It's an incredible amount of dedication by the Infrastructure team," Winslow said.

"They take the tests seriously and they spend a lot of time preparing. Without testing, you're only guessing at how effective you'd be. Because we perform audits and tests regularly, the Infrastructure team is confident in their abilities to recover our systems."

Taking care of you and your family

You've likely heard a lot of advice on what to do during an emergency, such as store one gallon of water per person per day, for at least a 3-day supply. But did you know you should program emergency contact numbers into your cell phone under "ICE" (for "In Case of Emergency") because many emergency responders will search there if they find your phone? Do you know how to help your children plan and understand? How to prepare for your pets? Deal with insurance?

A wide variety of information and sources to help you prepare for different emergencies is available at <http://access.wa.gov/emergency>. Consider taking some time to look through these sites and create a plan that fits your needs.

